

MEMORANDUM

## NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

INFORMATION

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December 20, 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR:

MR. KISSINGER

FROM:

JOHN H. HOLDRIDGE W.F.I. for J.H.H.

SUBJECT:

Communist Dry Season Intentions in South Vietnam

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

The Communists are apparently preparing for significantly increased military activity in early 1972 in the Western Highlands and in the northernmost province of South Vietnam. This conclusion is based on a quantum increase in enemy troops in the Western Highlands (B-3 Front), signs of a troop buildup in Quang Tri Province, and an increase in logistical support facilities for these areas.

ARMY review completed.

Large Increase in B-3 Front Forces

By far the most significant enemy buildup is in the Communists' B-3 Front. An estimated 19,400 troops will have arrived in the B-3 Front in 1971 -- compared with 7,700 arrivals in 1970. MACV J-2 believes that additional arrivals in January and February 1972 could reach 5,600. There are tentative signs that the 320th Division may be moving from North Vietnam to the B-3 Front and could arrive as early as January 1972. It is entirely possible that many, or most, troops assigned to the B-3 Front are still over the border in Cambodia or Laos.

Logistic support for the B-3 Front has been strengthened by the establishment (in southern Laos) of a major new Transportation Group (471) and at least two new Binh Trams (transportation bases).

Historically, the B-3 Front area is a vital logistics base and staging area for military activities throughout most of (GVN) Military Region II. COSVN Resolution 9 (1969) stated: "We must be resolute in expanding and perfecting our highland bases in order to build up a strong position for both our immediate and long-range struggles." This policy remains in effect, but has been difficult to implement because of insufficient forces.

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NSA review completed

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The current buildup could serve four basic purposes:

The Communists might be preparing to defend their vital border logistic bases (699, 701, and 702) against suspected ARVN attacks.

The enemy might for psychological effect want to overrun exposed ARVN bases, district capitals or even a provincial capital. Drawing ARVN forces to the highlands, in response to such attacks, would leave the populated coastal areas, especially in Binh Dinh Province, more exposed to attacks against the GVN pacification effort, a prime enemy objective. Furthermore, the Communists might feel that they could badly maul these ARVN units. According to Communist doctrine, the highlands is the best place to fight ARVN main forces.

An essential part of the current Communist antipacification campaign is the building of "revolutionary bases" (i.e., areas under effective Communist control). Only in the Western Highlands does this appear to be at all feasible under present circumstances. An effort to expand military and political control over this remote area could explain the reported creation of new VC provinces along the northwestern border.

In any case, the area where the Communists launched their first division-sized attack (in the Ia Drang Valley, October-November 1965), and numerous large assaults since, may soon again be the scene of intensified enemy operations. Logistics problems (especially getting enough rice from Cambodia) might, however, limit the intended scope of such operations.

#### Signs of Enemy Buildup in MR I

Enemy forces are also being strengthened in South Vietnam's northernmost province, Quang Tri. Elements of a fourth regiment have now joined other regiments operating in and out of the northeastern part of this province, and parts of the 304th Division are reportedly moving from North Vietnam into western Quang Tri Province.

There are also tenuous signs that the 324th Division may be leaving the North for the A Shau Valley. The 324th has, in the past, often operated in Quang Tri Province and in contiguous areas in Laos. The A Shau Valley is normally somewhat beyond the range of its operations in the South. The 324th last entered the valley in 1969.

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The above troop deployments might be primarily to protect bases and supply lines (especially those in Laos) and secondarily to lure the ARVN away from populated areas. According to recently intercepted enemy messages, the Communists are anticipating large scale ARVN attacks in the former LAM SON 719 area.

### "Three Front" Orchestration

Hanoi often stresses that it is fighting on "military, political, and diplomatic fronts" and generally seeks to relate actions on these fronts. Bearing this in mind, possibly as early as January Hanoi could be ready to begin the military operations described above - perhaps also including increased pressure in Cambodia and expansion of control in southern Laos. The annual Communist offensive in Northern Laos - which has begun earlier than usual this year - is probably the opening gambit in these planned dry season operations.

Military successes would enhance the offensive on the "diplomatic front" which will be designed both to counter the President's Peking trip and to pressure us into concessions at Paris. Thus, the Communists are organizing a large anti-U.S. conference in Paris (at Versailles) and reportedly an "Indochinese Summit Conference" in Hanoi - both to be held in February 1972.

On the "political front," military successes would, Hanoi hopes, enhance its present effort to strengthen its grass roots political structure in South Vietnam in order eventually to reverse GVN pacification gains.

If past experience is any guide, the orchestration of these efforts will be ragged at best, especially in coordinating military operations; nevertheless, Hanoi probably will try to give us some serious trouble in the next two months and possibly even more in the late spring.

And beyond the next several months, it seems clear that the Communists are investing some significant new assets for a longer term effort in the central highlands.

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